

PRESS RELEASE
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UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention tells Morocco to immediately release Western Sahara's Gdeim Izik prisoners

“We welcome the decision of the UN Working Group confirming the illegal detention of our sons and demand that Morocco immediately release them”, their families urged.

Over a decade since two dozen Sahrawi activists were handed down draconian sentences by a Moroccan court, the [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has concluded](#) that their detention is illegal and urged Rabat to immediately release the group, which includes journalists and human rights defenders from the Morocco-occupied Western Sahara, a territory under Moroccan occupation that is still pending decolonization. Named after the 2010 non-violent protest camp in Western Sahara that sparked the Arab Spring, the Gdeim Izik prisoners continue to this day to suffer under inhumane treatment amounting to torture.

Requesting the release of the prisoners, the UN Working Group pointed to egregious violations such as the denial of their right to access lawyers, confessions exerted under torture and the court's lack of impartiality and independence, concluding that the prisoners have been arbitrarily deprived of their freedom since their arrest in 2010. The UN Working Group also asked Morocco to ensure reparations and urged the Kingdom to investigate the arbitrary deprivation of liberty and to take actions against those responsible. The decision can be found [here](#).

Welcoming the decision, professor and former President-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group, Mads Andenas, who provides legal counsel to the prisoners, stated, *“The decision is an important confirmation of observations already made by numerous trial observers, [Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch](#), various [UN mandate holders](#) and by the UN Torture Committee. Knowing Morocco’s vicious trend and worryingly downward spiral of refusing to engage, denying serious violations and subjecting victims and their families to reprisals, we ask all states and third parties to put pressure on Morocco to implement this decision and release the prisoners”*.

In addition to finding the detention of these activists arbitrary, the UN Working Group expressed its grave concern about the number of alleged cases of arbitrary detention in Western Sahara. The UN Working Group also echoed the concerns already expressed by the UN Committee against Torture as well as multiple Special Procedures mandate holders on the case of the Gdeim Izik prisoners. The UN Torture Committee has already treated and published five decisions concerning Gdeim Izik prisoners [Mohammed Bani](#), [Abdeljalil Laaroussi](#), [Naama Asfari](#), [Mohammed Bourial](#) and [Sidi Abdallahi Abbahah](#) denouncing torture and usage of confessions signed under torture as the basis for their continued imprisonment.

Standing at the forefront of the battle for the release of the prisoners for the last 13 years are the families of the prisoners, most of them living in occupied Western Sahara, far away from their sons who are held in prisons within Morocco proper. *“We welcome the decision of the UN Working Group, confirming the illegal detention of our sons. We demand that Morocco immediately release them”*, the families urged.

The prisoners' families will hold a virtual press conference on 8 December at 12:00 CET calling for the immediate release of their loved ones and for Morocco to abide by and implement the Working Group's decision. Along with the families, the conference is organized with the League for the Protection of Saharawi Political Prisoners held within Moroccan jails (LPPS), the Geneva Support Group for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in Western Sahara, their legal counsels and with support from international organizations.

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